OPINION

BY MUNA KHAN

This Gen Z spirit

I HAVE often written about going to graduate school in my mid-40s and how much I loved being in the classroom after a 20-year gap. I highly recommend returning to a classroom, even if for a short course, if you have the means to. This is because you will *want* to learn versus because you *have* to check college off your things to do in life. My most memorable moments from grad school are attending demonstrations, as they remind me of my time as an undergraduate in London participating in rallies for Palestine. I'm not narrating this for street cred as much as I want to say that there is a long history of protesting against Israel's occupation. As a third-culture child who grew up sheltered in privilege, I owe most of my 'real' education to student groups — organising, learning to deal with different opinions and rallying for a common cause.

I attended the women's march in Washington, DC, in 2017 against Donald Trump's misogynistic comments, seen as a threat to women's rights. I had no skin in their game but I was glad to be part of this march, even if it was cute-sy in nature with pink hats and fun slogans. News reports estimated half a million attended the DC event and it was the largest single-day protest in the US. The other protest was on my campus, organised by Muslim groups against the so-called Muslim ban — Trump's executive order banning entry of people from six Muslim-majority countries. While much smaller in scale, it was beautiful to be part of something that felt more personal. And it was wonderful to watch young students lead and bring in allies from various communities to participate.

I'm reminded of this because of the recent protest at a university in Karachi against the harassment of a young female student for her choice of dress. She tried to file a complaint against the staff member, but instead of her grievances being addressed, she was reportedly expelled. Her post on social media prompted students to share their own experiences, organise and protest. The girl was reinstated. It's the kind of good cheer one needs to read more of.

As an aside, I have witnessed the harassment of female students by administrators at one university I taught at before new leadership put a stop to this policing. I was pleased then at how the girls fought back and were supported by faculty members. If only we could spend this much energy on teaching students instead of moral policing them.

Social media referred to the aforementioned recent event as a successful Gen Z protest, a reference to Gen Z protests across the Global South — from Bangladesh to Thailand, Nepal to Indonesia. Rage against the establishment fuelled students to take to the streets in these countries. While governments have responded in different ways, it's not yet clear whether Gen Z protests will be able to wield influence in policy changes or policymaking.

According to a 2020 paper by Harvard political scientist Erica Chenoweth, there's been a decline in the effectiveness of non-violent civilian resistance. "From the 1960s until about 2010, success rates for revolutionary nonviolent campaigns remained above 40 per cent … [but] since 2010, less than 34pc of nonviolent revolutions and a mere 8pc of violent ones have succeeded." Chenoweth puts this down to movements lacking "sustained grassroots civic action", which she says is "critical" for non-violent movements to have lasting impact. She says that today's movements "lack clear strategies for transforming protest demands into legislative priorities, finding ways to enter government and manage governance, and exercising leadership".

> It was wonderful to watch young students lead.

This may prove useful for students and other grassroots movements organising against so many issues of injustice and discrimination. Face-to-face organising, it turns out, is key and requires determined activists willing to do the work. They also require strategy because just like students use social media to amplify their message and organise, so too do governments which spread division and disinformation and use force to intimidate. We see this all the time here.

Corruption continues in Bangladesh; after some concessions, the Indonesian president has endorsed a crackdown on dissent; the youth-led movement that ousted the regime in Nepal has developed fissures and turned on the interim prime minister. Change takes time and we can look towards Sri Lanka to learn how the 2022 protests led to the election in 2024 of Anura Dissanayake of the National Peoples Power, a party that only secured 3pc of the vote in 2019. The BBC described him as "a disruptor to the old discredited political order". His success was seen as a clear rejection to the old days and ways.

I'm hopeful our Gen Z will find lessons from their Asian comrades and move forward with a steely will and courage. ■

The writer is an instructor of journalism.
X: @LedeingLady

BY AIZAZ AHMAD CHAUDHRY

Geoeconomic pivot

ALTHOUGH there is no universally agreed definition of the term, geoeconomics is widely understood as the use of economic instruments to promote geopolitical aims. The term was initially used during the Cold War in a Machiavellian sense, suggesting that economic coercion could be used to advance a nation's interests over its rivals. This interpretation began to change towards the end of the Cold War. In his 1990 article 'From geopolitics to geoeconomics' Edward Luttwak predicted that the logic of commerce would displace military methods and market penetration would be a higher priority than garrisons and bases. Did it happen this way? Of course not. As long as humans live, conflict can't be avoided. SIPRI has documented armed conflict in 49 states as of last year, and observed a record-high increase in conflict-related fatalities in 2024.

Geoeconomics must then not be seen as separate from geopolitics. It is essentially geopolitics by economic means. In these times, a wide range of economic instruments are being used, varyingly for friends and foes, to promote geopolitical goals, including tariffs, export bans, commodity prices, sanctions, subsidies, foreign aid and financial restrictions. A country that becomes relevant to global supply chains, financial systems, or advanced technologies, is better placed to use geoeconomics to promote its own interests. China, for instance, has successfully used its economic strength to advance its geopolitical interests, though it has lately started focusing on its military muscle too. Singapore, a small city-state, has leveraged its location to become a hub of global commerce and trade.

In Pakistan, the concept of geoeconomics was introduced only when the national security policy of 2022 was announced. This policy envisaged a more comprehensive definition of national security: traditional defence, economic and human security. In the realm of economic security, geoeconomics is seen as something that would leverage geography and prospects of regional connectivity to bolster national security. Pakistan is located at the confluence of three subregions of Asia: South, West and Central Asia. This economic geography connects countries that are home to billions of people, rich energy resources and young human resource. The question is: can Pakistan benefit from this economic geography? Yes, it can and it must. For that, Pakistan would need to join in efforts to make the region peaceful. It must also ensure a national ecosystem that is more conducive to economic growth and development.

First, it must align with forces seeking to economically uplift the region. Pakistan's economic cooperation with China through CPEC, and in turn with the Central Asian Republics and Eurasia, can yield huge dividends if internal security concerns are addressed on a priority basis. With its firm handling of recent security challenges, it appears that the government now fully realises the imperative of establishing the state's writ to secure economic benefits from investments by China and other friendly countries. Second, Pakistan must remain engaged with the US, particularly in the field of oil and gas exploration and mineral development. The argument that it should choose one power over the other does not align with the present when competition and cooperation have to coexist globally.

Third, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 opens up investment prospects which must be capitalised on, given the favourable climate created by the Pak-Saudi Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement. Fourth, in the wake of a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan must find innovative ways to boost economic cooperation with Iran, particularly through border markets.

> Can we benefit from our economic geography?

Fifth, Pakistan must deal with forces blocking geoeconomic dividends for it. A major obstacle is India's quest for regional dominance, which runs counter to the narrative of geoeconomics and blocks the region's east-west connectivity. To add to the complexity, Afghanistan's Taliban regime is teaming up with India to create trouble in Pakistan. The recent approach by Pakistan to deal with these challenges firmly has created room for these two countries to realise what they are missing out on in terms of cooperative regional geoeconomics.

Sixth, Pakistan must take measures to enable geoeconomics to work for it by making its trade and investment regime more attractive, improving ease of doing business, developing capacities to prepare feasibility studies, and building its legal capacity to make trade and investment deals that don't harm industry. Finally, Pakistan must project the narrative of a country that is ready to benefit from its geography and associated economic opportunities. ■

The writer is a former foreign secretary of Pakistan and chairman of Sanober Institute.

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

Jordan's pivotal role

RAWALPINDI: Prime Minister Bhutto said that under the remarkable leadership of King Hussein, Jordan had courageously borne the brunt of Israeli aggression. As a frontline country, Jordan has a pivotal role to play in the Arab struggle against Zionist aggression, Mr. Bhutto added. Extending hearty welcome to Crown Prince Hasan, the [PM] said the people of Pakistan greatly valued friendship with Jordan which had always extended resolute support to Pakistan in times of war and peace… .

Mr. Bhutto noted that the Middle East situation continued to be a cause of deep anxiety and that it carried far reaching implications for our region and the world at large. Pakistani people, he said, have always extended full support to Arab brothers.

[Meanwhile,] Crown Prince Hasan bin Talal tonight [Nov 1] said he had great personal attachment with Pakistan — "my Susral". During his speech at a banquet hosted by [PM Bhutto], the Crown Prince said: "Pakistan is my Susral ... and the possibility of visiting it more often is one that I would truly look forward to." The Crown Prince is married to Princess Sarwat, daughter of Begum Ikramullah. — News agencies

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

'Be firm'

KARACHI: "Nehru made his broad foreign policy understandable to a Westerner, even his somewhat neutral position to Russia and his refusal to go along with certain UN activities. But on Kashmir he put up arguments that failed to impress," said Mr I. Norman Smith, Associate Editor of the Ottawa Journal, Canada, who recently interviewed the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and Bharat in Karachi and Delhi respectively. In his interview with Mr Liaquat Ali Khan, he said, he asked what Canada or the Commonwealth could do to end the terrible dispute over Kashmir. The Prime Minister replied ... "You can use your influence to make India adopt a more reasonable course."

"The Prime Minister," he said, "felt that Nehru could not fail to heed the combined advice of the Commonwealth and the UN if only they would give that advice openly and frankly. To stand back in some kind of neutrality, or in fear that to annoy Nehru would bring some dire result, was simply to embrace evil rather than good."

Mr Smith thought that Pakistan's suggestion to settle the four disputes "between India and Pakistan i.e. Kashmir, canal waters, refugees and currency exchange "put her on the side of the angels".

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@dawn.com

Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

E-challan approach is at best half-baked

THIS is with reference to the report 'Petition lands in SHC against e-ticketing system' (Oct 31), according to which, the Sindh High Court has been approached to rule against the newly introduced electronic challan (e-challan) system in Karachi. While the initiation of the system is, indeed, a commendable step towards achieving corruption-free enforcement of traffic rules regardless of one's status, there are surely things that need to be set right in this regard.

One major limitation of the system is its inability to issue challans to vehicles registered in provinces other than Sindh. This gap in data integration hampers the system's effectiveness in penalising out-of-province vehicles for violations they commit in Karachi. Another alarming inability of the system as it exists today is to penalise violators whose vehicles are still under the name of previous owners. This loophole raises concerns about the system's accuracy and efficacy in holding the right individuals accountable.

The focus of the e-challan system seems primarily centred around enforcement without paying adequate attention to the foundational aspects of road safety. Without well-maintained infrastructure, proper traffic signage, implementation of smart signals, prominent road-markings and an effective road safety education system, the enforcement alone may not ensure efficient traffic management and accident prevention that are said to be two critical targets of the system.

The government should prioritise smooth roads and proper infrastructure before imposing fines on commuters. Besides, it should ensure that driver's licences are not issued to ineligible individuals. Only through a comprehensive strategy can Karachi hope to ensure safer roads, reduced violations, and an improved traffic flow.

Mohsin Ahmed Khan Ghori
Karachi

Unjust and alarming

THE manner in which the Sindh government has started imposing unbelievably high fines on the people of Karachi for minor traffic violations is alarming and unjustified. The fines range from Rs5,000 to Rs25,000 — a staggering and unrealistic amount, especially in view of the pathetic condition of roads across the city.

What makes the situation even more unjust is the comparison with Lahore, where fines for similar traffic offences remain between Rs200 and Rs500 — a fraction of what Karachi drivers are now being charged after the e-challan policy.

Also, the fines are being imposed without first putting up visible and standardised speed limit signs on the roads, or ensuring lane markings. How can commuters be penalised for 'violations' when the infrastructure itself is in such a bad condition?

Finally, the e-challan system has been selectively implemented in Karachi alone, with no rollout in the other cities of Sindh. This selective enforcement raises serious questions about the provincial government's intentions.

The people of Karachi surely deserve fair treatment, proper infrastructure and transparent regulation, not exploitation.

Syed Farhan Ahmed Qadri
Karachi

A flawed process

THE implementation of the e-challan system in Karachi is a welcome step towards digitising law-enforcement and promoting traffic discipline. However, its current execution has created significant public distress. The core issue lies not in the concept of automated fines, but in a flawed process that often penalises citizens incorrectly without a clear path to justice, eroding trust in the system.

Numerous complaints highlight fines being issued to the wrong vehicles or for minor, unintentional violations. The most critical flaw is the absence of a simple and efficient appeal mechanism. When a citizen receives an incorrect challan, the process to contest it is so cumbersome and opaque that many are forced to pay unjust fines out of sheer frustration. A system that only aims at punishing people without providing an accessible redressal platform is fundamentally unfair.

For the e-challan system to truly serve its stated purpose, immediate reforms are essential. The authorities must integrate a transparent, user-friendly online portal for disputing fines, ensuring every citizen has a voice. Furthermore, clear signage must be installed at all camera locations to act as a deterrent, not a trap.

It is crucial to transform the new system from being a source of resentment into a tool for genuine civic improvement.

Maheera Tariq
Lahore

Matter of priority

KARACHI has a crumbling infrastructure, with roads almost becoming a thing of the past. That being so, the system of e-challans introduced in the city is not in line with realities of the city and its commuters. The system would have been an effective way of eliminating the human element and bribery in law-enforcement had it been introduced by the Sindh government after doing something concrete about the city's infrastructure.

In the absence of lane markings, paved roads, signboards indicating speed limits, functioning traffic lights, etc., the e-challan system is unjust and bound to fail. The provincial government must fix the infrastructural issues before implementing the e-challan system with full force.

Arsalan Faruqi
Karachi

Sheer injustice

THE recent penalties on traffic offences imposed by the Sindh government are highly unfair, unjustified and illogical. It is a clear attempt to fleece people. The government seems to be totally oblivious to the miseries that are faced by the public owing to poor road infrastructure and transport system.

After having been in power for 15 successive years, the ruling party in Sindh has miserably failed to solve even a single problem that is constantly faced by Karachi and its people. Poor roads, persisting water, electricity and sewerage issues, inefficient garbage collection, rampant encroachments and mushroom growth in high-rise structures have made Karachi a concrete jungle of the worst type.

There are millions of motorcycles in the city, and, in the absence of a proper public transport system, entire families are forced to ride the same two-wheeler for their commute. The government would have been justified in issuing challans to such families had it placed an extensive network of buses plying on proper roads. It has not done the former, but has been very keen on doing the latter. Period.

Rubina Jan
Karachi

▶ **DUMPING SITE:** The Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) — entity responsible for ensuring there is no hazardous impact on the environment owing to industrial and other activities — deserves a resounding round of applause for having set up a garbage dumping site right in the Malir River bed near Iqra University. Residents of the surrounding area can now enjoy the pleasant aroma of waste being dumped daily. And, as winter approaches, they will be get to experience a Murree-like foggy environment with a smoky twist of burning waste. How nice! Perhaps Sepa has struck a deal with pharmaceutical companies and commercial health facilities for ensuring a steady stream of patients with asthma and other respiratory ailments.
Shaikh Khurram Yahya
Karachi

▶ **FUNCTIONS ON ROADS:** In an irritating development in Karachi's Old Clifton area — a VVIP and strictly residential zone — wedding functions are often held on the roads. Large tents are unlawfully erected in such cases, turning peaceful streets into noisy venues for loud celebrations that continue till late in the night, making it impossible for area residents to sleep. The area is left littered with filth afterwards. Moreover, organisers are seen drawing illegal electricity connections from nearby poles. The authorities concwerned must take action against all these violations.
Name withheld on request
Karachi

▶ **STREET CRIMES:** Kohat, once known for its calm and friendly environment, is now facing a rise in the number of street crimes, like thefts and snatchings. Many people have been deprived of their valuables in broad daylight, and some innocent lives have been lost in such incidents. The law and order situation is getting worse, and people try not to venture out after sunset. The authorities must take strict action against these criminals and increase security measures in the city. Streetlights should also be repaired, and cameras must be installed at busy points to control the situation.
Syed Mohsin Gillani
Kohat

The roar of the dragon

WEAPONS prove their worth only in real combat — not on paper, not in simulator drills, and not even in military exercises. A key lesson was learnt by governments and armed forces around the world after closely observing the strengths and limitations of Russian and Western systems during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. Then came on display the Chinese technology during the Pakistan-India tiff earlier this year, which made it difficult, if not impossible, for anyone not to learn the lesson in a hurry.

Before the wartime heroics of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) against India, the Chinese technology was long viewed as less effective, often dismissed as a by-product of technological 'theft' based on designs that originated in the United States and the erstwhile Soviet Union. The PAF supremacy over its Indian counterpart has shattered this myth once and for all. The PAF appeared more confident and decisive in the air, claiming multiple kills, including Rafales — one of the West's most advanced 4.5-generation fighters — using the Chinese PL-15 Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles having a range of 200-300km. This marked the first time Chinese technology decisively dominated Western systems in real combat. It also showcased Chinese cyber and electronic warfare tactics, employed by PAF, that broke the myth about the invincibility, reliability and superiority of Western weapon systems.

This could signal a major shift for countries unable to acquire Western weaponry or facing political hurdles — sending shockwaves through Western capitals as the mighty dragon emerges in the Global South by challenging the dominance of the Global North. A future conflict over Taiwan would have immense implications for the US military and its allies. Only by critically assessing the strengths and limitations of Chinese technology can the West hope to strategise effectively for the wars of tomorrow.

Abdullah Ali
Karachi

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
Email: dawnombudsman@gmail.com